

A TSUNAMI IN HISTORY

LITUYA BAY

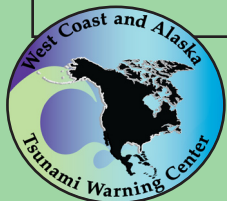
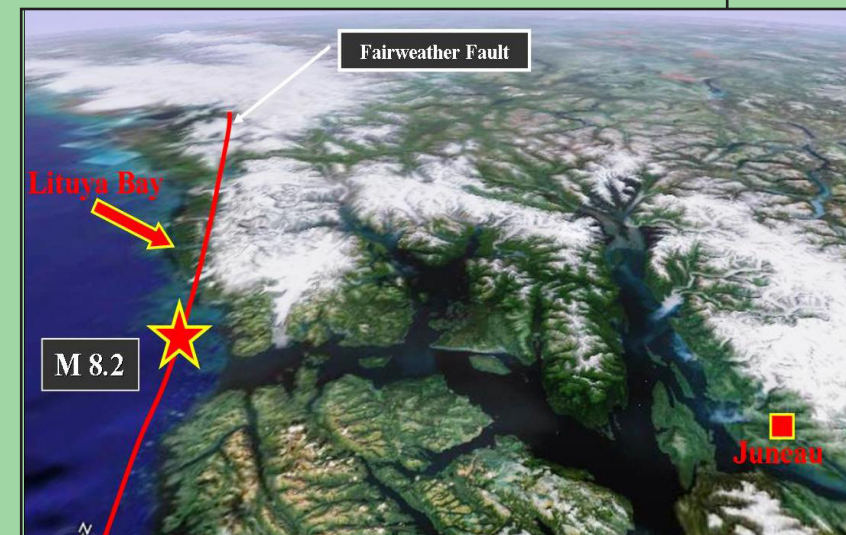
10 JULY 1958, M8.2



A monster dwelt in the bay. It is said that the monster destroyed all who entered the bay by grasping the surface of the water and shaking it like a sheet. When vessels approached the bay, a warning was given, and the frog figure and the bear slave grabbed the surface of the water and violently shook it. Disrespect shown to Land Otter Men could cause such waves. "This flood was caused by an avalanche which poured into the bay and filled it up, forcing the water out." They believed that the massive wave had been caused by angry Land Otter Men.

This has happened many times, say the trees, in Lituya Bay's history. It happened in 1853, 1874, 1936, and 1958 according to the tree rings measured by USGS geologists. The 1958 impact rings were measured from trees cut at 1700' above sea-level. In 1936, the bay roared for 30 minutes! We know this because there are survivors to tell us their stories.

Thursday evening in July, the light lingered with 3 fishing boats anchored in the bay. The occupants of 2 of those vessels lived to tell the tale of the world's tallest local tsunami. A M8.2 earthquake cracked the Fairweather Fault, throwing ice and shaking loose a massive landslide that slammed the water, causing a tree-clearing splash taller than the Empire State Building. An equally ferocious tsunami rounded the bend shaving Spruce trees and tossed the fishing boats about, one across the spit into the sea.



http://wcatwc.arh.noaa.gov/web_tsus/19580710/damage.htm

photo shot in 1954 by D.J. Miller, USGS

map courtesy of Jamie Roush of AEIC and google maps

